

CROSS-DRESSING IN THE DECLAMATIONS OF CHORICIUS OF GAZA

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RÉSUMÉ

Le travestissement est un thème majeur dans deux déclamations de Choricus : *Les Lydiens* (Déclamation 3) et *Le héros de guerre* (Déclamation 11). Dans ces deux déclamations, les locuteurs eux-mêmes considèrent l'habillement comme un marqueur important de l'identité sexuelle, de sorte que le port de vêtements féminins compromet gravement le statut masculin du travesti selon l'avis qui voit le sexe en tant que construction sociale. Pourtant, dans les deux discours on trouve aussi implicitement l'argument contraire. Cet article soutient que Choricus (et en cela il n'est pas le seul orateur grec de l'Antiquité tardive à le faire) promeut une vision essentialiste du sexe, qui rejette l'habillement et l'apparence physique comme marqueurs fiables du moi intérieur. Tandis que la majorité des penseurs chrétiens croit que l'état (ou l'apparence) du corps révèle et/ou influence l'état de l'âme, on relève toutefois des tendances « essentialistes » non seulement dans leur propre pensée, mais aussi (chose étonnante) dans les histoires populaires sur les saints et martyrs, dont certains comportent même le travestissement. S'avère également pertinente pour la dissociation entre apparence (efféminée) et réalité (masculine) des travestis chez Choricus, l'émergence, dans l'Antiquité tardive, d'une notion d'intimité, qui permet à un individu de mener une vie tout à fait secrète, parfois opposée à son image publique.

ABSTRACT

Cross-dressing is a major theme in two of Choricus' declamations: the Lydians (Declamation 3) and the War-Hero (Declamation 11). In both declamations dress is considered, by the speakers themselves, a significant marker of gender identity, so that putting on feminine clothes seriously jeopardises the cross-dresser's masculine status – a line of reasoning that sees gender as socially constructed. The opposite argument, however, is latent in both speeches. This paper argues that Choricus (and in this he is not alone among Greek Late Antique orators) promulgates an essentialist view of gender, which dismisses dress and physical appearance as reliable indicators for the condition of the inner self. While for many Christian thinkers the condition (or appearance) of the body reveals and/or influences the condition of the soul, there are

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“essentialist” trends not only in their own thinking, but also (and more strikingly) in popular stories about saints and martyrs, some of which even involve transvestism. It is also relevant for the dissociation between the (effeminate) appearance and the (masculine) reality of Choricus’ transvestites that there emerges in Late Antiquity a sense of privacy, which allows an individual to lead an entirely secret life, which could contrast with his/her public image.

Declamation has (increasingly) often been studied from the perspective of gender. As a genre with an obvious epideictic and pedagogical function, written by men to impress or educate other men, but often adopting or featuring female voices, declamation can tell us a lot about ancient conceptions of masculinity. A considerable amount of scholarly work has focused on the Greek and Roman declamation of the early Imperial Period, examining how these display speeches work to construct, challenge, and reinforce the boundaries of the elite masculine ideal ¹. Late Antique non-Christian rhetoric, however, has very rarely attracted attention for anything beyond the information it can provide about contemporary politics or education. This paper will attempt a reading of two Late Antique declamations, both written by Choricus of Gaza, using the methodology of gender studies, which, it will be seen, can be a useful tool in analysing works of the so-called Third Sophistic ² (to which Choricus belongs), just as it has proved to be for the study of Second Sophistic literature and rhetoric.

The declamations of Choricus of Gaza, an (in all probability Christian) ³ orator of the early sixth century C.E., exhibit, as Schouler puts it, “pour la féminité un intérêt qui n’est pas exceptionnel chez les déclamateurs (ou les auteurs de roman) mais qui est tout à fait manifeste” ⁴. The two works to be examined here are no exception. The speakers of both declamations have had experiences of cross-dressing, and speak in defence of their transvestism, presenting arguments that highlight their interest in the well-being and the emotions of women. I will first summarise the contents of the two declamations, before going on to examine the ways in which they differ from “classical” accounts of cross-dressing, and how they present a new conception of gender and selfhood.

Declamation 3 is based on a storyline from Herodotus’ *Histories* ⁵, where we hear about Cyrus’ decision to take away the weapons of the Lydians – a famous and

1. See, most notably, Gunderson 2000 and 2003 for Latin declamation, and Gleason 1995 for Greek.

2. The term “Third Sophistic” was first used by Pernot 1993, p. 14 n. 9 – repeated also in Pernot 2000, p. 271–272. Pernot has recently argued for continuity and similarity between the Second and Third Sophistic – see Pernot 2006–2007. Lieve Van Hoof 2010, p. 214 has instead called for abandoning the term “Third Sophistic” altogether, and looking at these Late Antique texts “through the lens of the Second Sophistic”.

3. For the Christianity of both Choricus and his teacher Procopius, see Penella 2009, p. 4 n. 14 with further bibliography.

4. Schouler 2005, p. 133.

5. See Hdt., I, 154–160.

respected race of warriors that he has defeated in battle – and have them dress as women and train as musicians instead. Choricus adds a new twist to the Herodotean story: Cyrus, engaged in a war with the Massagetae ⁶, has now changed his mind about the Lydians and wants them to take up weapons again and fight in his army. A delegation is dispatched from the Lydians to try to convince Cyrus that such an enterprise would be bound to fail. The Lydians argue that they have been so successfully feminised, that it would be impossible for them to take up arms again and become men/soldiers. Their entire speech, however, is a “disguise” ⁷: Choricus has informed us in the *Explanatory Comment* which preceded the declamation that the Lydians are in fact eager to shed their feminine garb and become soldiers again, but are afraid that, if they jump at his offer, Cyrus might suspect that they are planning a revolt against him, since, underneath their feminine clothes, they are still men keen on war. The Lydians hope that Cyrus will pick up on their allusions to their previous valour in war, and will decide to rearm them in spite of their own apparent refusal.

Declamation 11 is delivered by a “War Hero” (ἄριστεύς), a general who saved his city from the attack of an enemy city. The problem is that he accomplished his military feat disguised as a woman, and one of the city’s laws stipulates that a war hero should be depicted in a commemorative painting performing the feat that saved the city. The speaker was the second general who was called to defend the city: the first general, who engaged the enemy in open battle, was defeated, and although the second general tried to convince the city’s soldiers to enter battle once more, he was not successful, and was thus left with no other choice but to use feminine clothes as a disguise to infiltrate the enemy camp at night. Now the first general, out of spite, has requested that the law be obeyed, meaning that the War Hero should pose in feminine garb for a painting of him to be made and exhibited in public. The speaker of this declamation argues that it is the spirit of the law that should be obeyed, and not the letter, and that his deed was forced upon him, was shameful, and should be allowed to slip into collective oblivion.

As mentioned above, the speakers of both declamations show a keen interest in the thoughts and emotions of women, perhaps influenced by their transvestite experiences, although not necessarily so. The Lydians (39–42) claim that, at the beginning, their wives found them funny and despised them for being effeminate, but as the men’s love of war began to wane and their skills in music improved, they sang to their wives “of the many bridal chambers war has made bereft, distracting them so they forget the prizes of combat which we brought home to them in victory” ⁸. The War Hero also alleges that his transvestism was to the benefit of the city’s women

6. This detail is also taken from Hdt. I, 201–216.

7. On this speech as a “figured” oration or λόγος ἐσχηματισμένος, see Penella 2009, p. 18 n. 78 with further bibliography.

8. Chor., *Decl.* 3, 42: ταῖς γυναιξὶν ἄδομεν, ὅσας ἐποίησε παστάδας ἐρήμους ὁ πόλεμος, εἰς λήθην αὐτὰς ἀφελκόμενοι τῶν ἐκ τῆς παρατάξεως ἄθλων, ὅσα νικῶντες αὐταῖς ἤγομεν οἶκαδε. The Greek text is that of Foerster 1929. All translations of Choricus are taken from Penella 2009.

and children: “I did not hesitate, you see, to appear as a woman to the enemy so that I might rescue the women from their excess, nor to dress unnaturally so that the youth might not suffer anything unnatural”⁹.

Later on, the speaker of this declamation also argues that a commemorative painting of his success, depicting the losses of the enemy, might stir the emotions and painful memories of those women who lost their beloved sons, brothers or husbands in that same war (under the leadership of the first general), not allowing the passing of time to assuage those women’s suffering (50-54). It is significant that, while making this argument, the speaker (mis-)uses the famous story of Leontius from Plato’s *Republic*: the Platonic Leontius, passing by the place where the executioner threw the bodies, was defeated, after an internal struggle, by his own desire to see the corpses, and allowed his eyes to take in the view, although knowing full well the sight would be disgusting. According to Choricus’ War Hero, it is specifically women who are attracted to sights that would cause them to suffer¹⁰. The wording of the two passages is almost identical, but, where Plato speaks of human nature, the War Hero sees female weakness:

Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαίωνος ἀνιὼν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοί, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραῖνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτὸν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιτο, κρατούμενος δ’ οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς, προσδραμών πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, ‘Ἴδου ὑμῖν’, ἔφη, ‘ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος’¹¹.

εἰ δέ ποτε μήτηρ νεανίσκου τινὸς ἐν τῇ μάχῃ πεσόντος, ὃν ἐτύγχανεν ἔχουσα μόνον, βαδίζοι τὴν ἄγουσαν παρὰ τὴν εἰκόνα πορείαν, ἅμα μὲν ἐπιθυμήσει τῆς θέας ἐπὶ νοῦν αὐτῇ τὸ πένθος ἀγούσης – ἐπιθυμοῦσι γὰρ καὶ τὰς αὐτῶν ὁρᾶν συμφορὰς αἱ γυναῖκες – ἅμα δ’ ἂν δυσχεραῖνοι καὶ αὐτὴν ἀποτρέποι καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιτο, ὑπὸ δ’ οὖν τῆς ἐπιθυμίας κρατηθεῖσα τὴν γραφὴν θεωμένη στένουσα λέξει· ‘τί μοι τῶν

9. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 34: οὐκ ἀπώκνησα τοῖνον γυνὴ δόξαι τοῖς ἐναντίοις, ἵνα τὰ γυναῖκα ῥύσωμαι τῆς ἐκείνων ἀκολασίας, καὶ περιστέλλαι τὴν φύσιν, ὅπως μὴ παρὰ φύσιν ἡ νεότης τι πάθῃ. On this passage and Choricus’ evoking the *ekphrasis* of the *urbs capta*, see Webb 2006, p. 112-113.

10. Choricus’ Priam, on the other hand, attributes to all humans, and not just women, a certain desire to view the place where they have suffered misfortunes; see Chor., *Decl.* 2, 59: ἔλκονται μὲν εἰς θέαν ἐνίοτε τοῦ χωρίου τῇ μνήμῃ τῆς συμφορᾶς, φιλονεικοῦσι δὲ μεταφέρειν εἰς ἑννοιᾶν τινα τὴν ψυχὴν, ἵνα περὶ ταύτην, ὡς εἰκός, ἀσχολούμενοι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τῆς θέας βιάσωνται. Augustine also speaks of people’s curiosity to see corpses, even though it will make them sad and turn them pale; women are not singled out as more curious than men. See Aug., *Conf. X*, 35, 55.

11. Plat., *Rep.* 439e-440a: “Leontius the son of Aglaeon was coming up from Piraeus, outside the North Wall but close to it, when he saw some corpses with the public executioner standing near by. On the one hand, he experienced the desire to see them, but at the same time he felt disgust and averted his gaze. For a while, he struggled and kept his hands over his eyes, but finally he was overcome by desire; he opened his eyes wide, run up to the corpses, and said, ‘There you are, you wretches! What a lovely sight! I hope you feel satisfied!’” (trad. Waterfield 1993).

ὁρωμένων τὸ κέρδος ἀποβαλούσῃ τὸν παῖδα; τί με τούτωνι τῶν ἐρριμμένων
εὐφραίνει τὸ πλῆθος ἐτέρας οὐκ οὔσης γονῆς;¹².

At one and the same time, the War Hero proves to be sensitive to the reactions and potential distress of the city's grief-stricken women, to the extent that he is able to produce the words one of those women might proffer while looking at the painting, *and* can deliberately distort a famous Platonic passage about the human desire to see things that would cause pain or disgust to make it pertain exclusively (or at least especially) to women, thus subscribing to a very rigid gender dichotomy that sees the ideal man as strong and able to control himself, unlike weak-minded women, who are driven by their emotions and desires¹³. My suggestion is that the War Hero's identification with female experiences on the one hand, and his attempt to show that he is able to extricate himself from those very experiences – ascribed solely to women – on the other has a lot to do with the ancient conception of gender, and especially masculinity, as (paradoxically) both a social construction (depending to a great extent on education, training, wearing the right clothes, performing the right gestures, speaking the right way) *and* an essentialist category (determined by biological sex and thus unalterable)¹⁴. The War Hero, being biologically a man, can safely present women as totally different (and inferior) in relation to men, and having been a cross-dresser, he can more easily see himself in their place and “construct” himself as feminine¹⁵.

While in Choricus' declamations we can find evidence of both views of gender (“social construction” and essentialism), which is very much in line with the understanding of gender in earlier times, essentialism, it will be argued later on, seems

12. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 52: “If the mother of some young lad who fell in the war should chance to be taking a walk on the road leading by the commemorative painting, a mother who happened to have only that son, she will eagerly desire this sight, which brings pain to her mind – for women eagerly desire to look upon their own calamities – but she would also be vexed and would turn herself away and for a while she would struggle and hide her face from the painting; but finally overcome by the desire, looking upon the memorial and groaning, she will say, ‘What gain is there from these sights for me when I have lost my child? How do these many men lying dead gladden me when I have no other child?’”

13. There are extensive re-elaborations of Platonic passages in Choricus' funeral and encomiastic orations; see e.g. *Oratio funebris in Mariam* 3 and 29 (in this passage Plato is mentioned by name), with the comments by Greco 2010, *ad loc.* Cf. Greco 2007, p. 99-109 on Plato in the encomiastic orations on Marcianus. On Choricus' creative distortion of Plato's views on poetry, see Hadjitofti forthcoming.

14. On this contradictory conception of gender, see Gleason 1995, p. 73; Gunderson 2000, p. 78-86; and Webb 2008, p. 162.

15. According to Bloomer 1997, p. 212, “[i]n [Roman] declamation the greatest challenge, the greatest training and virtuosity lay with the adoption of the minor voices”, that is, the voices of people below the station of the orator. While this is definitely a function of all declamation, and many Greek and Roman rhetors deliver speeches supposedly spoken by mythological or imaginary women, the adoption of a female voice by a current or former transvestite is a different affair, given how compromised the cross-dresser's masculinity would already appear. Moreover, the passage discussed here deals explicitly with (allegedly) gendered behaviour.

to win the day, and to do so in a way that might be compatible with a Christian conception of identity, gendered and otherwise. To start with the Lydians and their apparent belief in the construction of gender through the repetition of gendered acts, their entire speech is an attempt to persuade the audience, real (Choricus' students and colleagues) and imaginary (Cyrus), that prolonged exposure to female clothes and activities can turn men unmanly. One of their arguments refers to a situation that is similar to that of the War Hero:

εἰ μὲν γὰρ εἰς ἐνέδραν καὶ λόχον συνιόντες παραπέτασμα δόλου τὴν γυναικείαν στολὴν πεποιήμεθα, πρόχειρον ἦν ἀποδύσασθαι τὴν ἀπάτην καὶ τὴν πανοπλίαν ἀζημίως ἀναλαβεῖν, ἐλπίζομένη γὰρ τῶν ὅπλων ἡ κτήσις οὐ συνεχώρει **θηλύνεσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν γυναικεῖοις ἐσθήμασι**· τὸ δὲ μὴ προσδοκᾶν ἀσπίδος ἔτι τυχεῖν εἰς **ἀναιμένην** ἡμᾶς ἐκίνησε **δίαιταν** ¹⁶.

From a point of view that considers gender artificial, that is, depending on lifestyle (δίαιτα), and sees masculinity as a precious construct, achieved through constant practice, what the Lydians say is entirely credible. Elsewhere in Choricus' works we can find similar views expressed by different characters or even by Choricus in his own persona. In *Declamation 2* (14-21), Priam, speaking in support of accepting the help of the Amazons, says that, if women are weaker than men, it is a matter of training, not of nature. And just as women can acquire, through physical exercise, the skills necessary to fight in battle, so can men abandon their weapons and quickly become skilled in weaving (καὶ ἄνδρες ἀφέντες τὰ ὅπλα τὴν ταλασίαν μετέλθωσι, ταχέως ὅψει τὰ γυναικῶν ἐργαζομένους); Achilles is adduced as an example of a man who was dressed as a girl (by his mother, on Skyros) and learned to do what girls do (λέγεται τὸν Ἀχιλλεῖα σχήματι περιστεῖλαι κόρης ἢ μήτηρ καὶ παρασκευάσαι τὰ παρθένων ποιεῖν) ¹⁷. In one of his *Preliminary Talks* (10; *opus* 18 in Foerster 1929), where the orator speaks in his own voice, Choricus extols the value of hard work and practice. One of the examples he mentions is the Spartan Lysander, who went to Ionia, adopted a luxurious lifestyle, saw his bodily strength gradually become like a woman's (ἡ τοῦ σώματος ἰσχὺς ἐθηλύνετο καὶ ἐμμεῖτο τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ), and learned the hard way that "neither a Spartan nor a Lysander is fit in war if he does not take care of himself" (ἀμελῶν).

16. Chor., *Decl.* 3, 20: "Whenever we have assembled in ambush and used women's dress to disguise the trick, it was easy to divest ourselves of the deceit and put on our armour without a problem, for the expectation of holding weapons did not allow *our hearts to become womanly along with our women's clothes*. What turned us to a *life of relaxation* is the fact that we no longer expect to have a shield."

17. Priam has an interest in reminding his audience of this particular part of Achilles' life, as his main objective in this declamation is to persuade the Trojan assembly that Achilles, in love with Polyxena and offering to fight on the Trojans' side if she becomes his wife, would make a bad husband and a bad defender of Troy. I will come back to the myth of Achilles' transvestism on Skyros later in this paper.

All this implies that it takes a good amount of neglect (ἀμέλεια) to turn a man unmanly (like Lysander in Ionia)¹⁸: the Lydians also did not become effeminate from one day to the other, but, as mentioned above, their love of war faded gradually, just as their skills in feminine activities improved (39-41). There is a striking sentence early in their speech, however, which seems to suggest a more rapid development. Right after highlighting the importance of training and constant practice in achieving martial prowess, they claim that, “when a man strips off his armour, he strips off his spirit too” (6: ἅμα γὰρ ὅπλοις ἐκδυομένοις συνεκδύεται καὶ τὸν θυμὸν ἀνὴρ). This instantaneous transformation of a man into a non-man when he takes off his armour is in fact patterned onto a Herodotean pronouncement that speaks of women’s shedding their modesty along with their clothes. That sentence was spoken by Gyges to king Candaules, when the latter asked the first to see his queen naked; Gyges tried to decline, finding the proposal shameful, and saying that “a woman doffs her modesty when she doffs her clothes” (1, 8, 2: ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένην συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή). The syntactical structure of the two sentences is identical. Where Herodotus has the modesty and respectability of a woman depending on her dress, the Lydians claim that it is the courage and spirit of *a man* that depends entirely on his outward appearance, his wearing his armour. Plutarch already pointed out how problematic it is to consider dress as a (or *the*) reliable indicator of a woman’s virtue, saying, in relation to the Herodotean passage, that “the opposite is true: a good woman wears modesty in place of clothes”¹⁹. If we take into account the “figured” nature of the Lydians’ speech, Choricus must, in fact, agree with Plutarch in seeing clothes as a non-defining characteristic of a person’s identity – a point to which I will return later. If we take what the Lydians say at face value, however, it will seem that Choricus, along with earlier as well as other Late Antique authors²⁰, considers masculinity an extremely precarious state, which can depend on such detachable accoutrements as clothes and weapons²¹.

If we now turn to the War Hero and the way he defends his transvestism, we can also see, although more indirectly, how for this character as well masculinity is perceived as a construct, which can be seriously compromised by transvestism, even if it is not prolonged, as in the Lydians’ case, but used briefly as part of a stratagem. One of the first arguments he uses in his speech (18-23) is that Odysseus, a respectable Homeric hero, also participated in nocturnal raids (in the Iliadic Doloneia), as well

18. On the Lydians’ “neglect” of their arms, see Chor., *Decl.* 3, 30, quoted below in n. 33.

19. See Plut., *Coniug. Praec.* 139c: Οὐκ ὀρθῶς Ἡρόδοτος εἶπεν ὅτι ἡ γυνὴ ἅμα τῷ χιτῶνι ἐκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ· τοῦναντίον γὰρ ἡ σώφρων ἀντενδύεται τὴν αἰδῶ.

20. For a slightly earlier author for whom weapons can be “the only source of virility”, see Nonnus of Panopolis and his representation of Ares in the *Dionysiaca*, with the comments by Miguélez Caverio 2009, p. 571. For Ares’ alter ego in the *Dionysiaca*, Morpheus, and his own precarious virility, see Hadjittofi 2014, p. 165-170.

21. On the contrary, the Homeric hero’s weapons appear almost as extensions of his body; see Vernant 1991, p. 37.

as disguised himself, wearing a poor man's rags, in order to deceive the suitors in the *Odyssey*. Trickery and disguise, however, could be perceived in antiquity, as well as in modern times, as feminine or passive strategies²². In the same passage the War Hero adduces as a paradigm of manliness not compromised by momentary cross-dressing the Macedonian youths who disguised as women in order to kill the Persian delegates, who demanded to sleep with the Macedonians' women, during a banquet²³. This story is told in Herodotus (V, 20), and includes an important detail the War Hero purposefully omits: the Macedonians who were chosen to don feminine clothes and pose as women were very young, beardless men (ἄνδρας λειογενεῖους)²⁴. It is also significant that in the only extant declamation that is based on a scenario similar to Choricus' War Hero, Pseudo-Quintilian's *Minor Declamation* 282 – a man disguised as a woman killed a tyrant, a statue of him in feminine garb was erected by a magistrate, who, in the speech, defends his decision to put up the statue – the transvestite hero is said to be “still a boy” (*puerum adhuc*) who entered the tyrant's castle wearing his sister's clothes²⁵.

Choricus' War Hero is a grown man and a general, unlike the transvestite boys of Herodotus and Pseudo-Quintilian, whose manliness was not yet affirmed, and thus could not be seriously undermined. In earlier times, transvestism in the context of initiation rituals would allow boys to act out, for the last time, the role of the opposite sex, before assuming, unequivocally, their masculine identity – an experience that could be replicated in the theatre, described by Zeitlin as a “species of recurrent masculine initiations”²⁶. Choricus' War Hero, however, is neither young enough for

22. For a modern evaluation of Odysseus' heroics as, to a great extent, passive see Cook 1999, p. 152-167. In Plato's *Hippias Minor* Socrates defends Odysseus as a finer hero than Achilles, while Hippias expresses the view that Achilles' heroism is “more noble than Odysseus' heroics of endurance” – a view apparently more “mainstream” than the one defended by Socrates; see Hobbs 2000, p. 196-197.

23. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 21: Ὡς δὲ καὶ γυναῖδων χιτῶν ἀνεύθυνον, ὅταν ἡ σωτηρία πανταχόθεν ἄπορος ᾖ, μαρτυρία διαφανὴς οἱ Πέρσας παρὰ τὸ δεῖπνον ἀσελγείᾳ μεθύοντας ἀποκτείναντες ἐν ἱματίοις ἄλλοτριῶις τῆς φύσεως, “And clear witnesses that even the dress of a woman is guiltless whenever safety is unattainable in any other way are those who slaughtered the Persians drunk with licentiousness at dinner, when the former had on cloaks that were foreign to their nature.”

24. In Plutarch's *Solon* (8, 4-5) the Athenians also resort to cross-dressing to deceive their Megarian enemies. Solon selects those of his men who are very young and beardless (τῶν δὲ νεωτέρων τοὺς μηδέπω γενειῶν) to pose as women and make the Megarians come to the shore.

25. It is interesting that the speakers of both declamations are concerned with the interpretation of the work of art in the future. The magistrate of Pseudo-Quintilian claims that the statue will cause people passing by to stop and ask questions, and imagines an old man telling the story of the cross-dressed tyrannicide; his statue will, thus, turn the hero famous (*notabilis*) among tyrannicides. Choricus' War Hero (*Decl.* 11, 64-66), on the other hand, worries that in the distant future nobody will remember why he was forced to take up this disguise, so that the painting will only make him the object of scoffing.

26. See Zeitlin 1996, p. 344-345 with further bibliography on ritual transvestism. Cf. Cyrino 1998, p. 211.

his transvestism to be considered a momentary “lapse” on the way to adulthood²⁷, nor willing to be counted among actors, as he declares that he despises men who play the part of women in the theatre of Dionysus:

κινδύνου χωρὶς μισῶ τὰ γυναικῶν ὑποκρινόμενον ἄνδρα, καὶ τραγῳδοῦς
ἐν Διονύσου γύναϊα σχηματιζομένους ὁρῶν ἐγκαλύπτομαι. ἅπας μὲν γὰρ
ἄνθρωπος θῆλυ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον ἄρον θέαμα, στρατιώτης δὲ μάλιστα
δύναμιν ἔμφυτον ἔχων καὶ σφριγῶσαν γυμνασίῳις πολεμικοῖς, ὥπερ ὁ
τοιοῦτος γυναικὸς πλεον ἀπᾶδει²⁸.

For the War Hero (though not for Choricus, as it will be seen later), actors violate nature by playing female roles – an argument that would sit very well in a Christian diatribe against theatrical mimesis²⁹. And if cross-dressing is shameful for every man, it is especially so for a soldier. It is significant that the War Hero considers the abilities of the soldier innate or natural (ἔμφυτον), but also reaching their full force in the fields of battle (or, for a more literal translation, in military training: γυμνασίῳις πολεμικοῖς). Men who stay away from battle and wear feminine clothes, just like the Lydians, effectively forgo their masculine status and “construct” themselves as women. Unlike the super-masculine figures of Achilles and Heracles, who are able to perform femininity (Achilles on Skyros, and Heracles in the Omphale episode), but then absorb it, reasserting their virility³⁰, the anonymous transvestites who appear in Choricus’ works freely admit that cross-dressing has seriously compromised their masculinity.

My final example of the War Hero’s interpretation of gender as a “social construction” comes towards the end of his speech. The War Hero’s plead not to depict his transvestism in a memorial turns to using metaphor and presents here a kind of parallel, imaginary scenario, where a general convinces the concubine of his enemy to kill him in his sleep. The War Hero says that his imaginary counterpart should also not have to see his action commemorated in a painting:

εἴ τῳ στρατηγῶντι τῶν ἐναντίων παλλακὴ τις ὑπῆρχε συνοῦσα [...] εἰ
τοῖνον ἐρασθεῖσα τοῦ τῆς πόλεως ἔτυχε στρατηγοῦ, ὁ δὲ πλησιάσας
ἐκείνη καὶ γάμου ψευδεῖ κουφίσας αὐτὴν ὑποσχέσει ἔπεισε τὸν ἄνδρα
καθεύδοντα διαχρήσασθαι – τί δὲ οὐκ ἂν ἐρώμενος πείσειεν ἐρώσαν

27. For Achilles’ cross-dressing on Skyros as a “misguided interlude” that anyone would be liable to experience in childhood see Cameron 2009, p. 19.

28. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 29-30: “If there is no danger, *I hate the man who plays the part of a woman*, and I am ashamed when I see actors in the theatre of Dionysus playing female roles. For every man who puts on female clothing is an unseemly sight, but especially a soldier, who has *an ability that is natural and in full force in the fields of battle*, where such a one *most differs from a woman*.”

29. On these attacks see Leyerle 2001, p. 20-74, and Webb 2008, *passim*.

30. See Cyrino 1998, p. 211, who analyses both myths, and argues that for these larger-than-life heroes “the fiction of femininity enacted by means of cross-dressing is ultimately intended to reassert the reality of maleness”. Raval 2002, p. 151 also maintains that in the Ovidian corpus the transvestite heroes and gods at the end reassert their masculinity, “thus reinforcing a gender binary”.

τολμήσαι; – εἰ ταῦτα οὕτως ἐπράχθη, ἔδει δὲ μοιχεύοντα γράψαι τὸν τῆς πόλεως εὐεργέτην καὶ δι’ ἧς ἡμῖν ὁ κίνδυνος πέρας εἰλήφει ³¹.

The imaginary general who becomes an adulterer (μοιχός) to defend his city is seen as a good parallel for our general, as he is also feminised to an extent, and would be ashamed of his behaviour. Using sexual allure to achieve an aim and resorting to seduction (giving false promises of sexual fulfilment) are not acceptable ways for a general to fight his battles – these are markedly feminine strategies. Moreover, the general of this imaginary scenario is feminised by his very position as the object of desire, rather than the subject. The language of the War Hero betrays the problematic nature of this illicit affair. The enemy’s concubine is the desiring subject (ἐρώσαν), while the general is reduced to the position of the “passive” beloved (ἐρώμενος) – the same word would be applied to a man who offers his body for the enjoyment of another man. Indeed, there is a very close relationship between the adulterer, the cross-dresser, and the ἐρώμενος in ancient imagination: the adulterer is “thought to adopt feminine clothing and to indulge in excessive grooming in order to make himself more attractive to women”, but this kind of behaviour could also make him the target of accusations that he would also be willing to become a man’s ἐρώμενος ³².

My argument so far has highlighted the “constructedness” of gender for both the Lydians and the War Hero. In both declamations dress is considered a significant marker of gender identity, so that putting on feminine clothes seriously jeopardises the cross-dresser’s masculine status. The opposite argument, however, is latent in both works. The Lydians have not, in fact, become women, in spite of their prolonged exposure to feminine activities and clothes. Everything they say should be taken to mean the contrary. Their love of warfare has *not* waned, gradually or otherwise; they still hope that Cyrus will decide to rearm them and send them to war. If, *even* after so much time spent wearing women’s clothes and learning how to sing and play instruments and weave, the Lydians remain men who do want to fight in a war, this must be a desire innate in them as men – gender emerges as an essentialist category. When they ask “With us has not the fictitious life turned from neglect [of arms] into an ingrained cowardliness?” ³³, the answer they anticipate in the context of their speech is: “Yes, the imitation (μίμησις) of cowardliness has made that trait ingrained (ἔμφυτον).” The “correct” answer, however, the one that the audience knows to be

31. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 85: “If an enemy general happened to have a concubine with him [...] and if she turned out to desire our city’s general, and he drew near to her, mollified her with false promise of marriage, and by this promise persuaded her to kill the enemy general while he was asleep – and what could the *beloved* not persuade the *lover* to undertake? – if, I say, things happened in this way, we would have to commemorate the general who helped the city through the *illicit affair*.”

32. See Jones 2012, p. 240–241 on the effeminacy of Achilles Tatius’ Cleitophon, manifested through his transvestism and his overall behaviour in his affair with Melite, with further comments and bibliography on the “culturally notorious figure” of the adulterer.

33. Chor., *Decl.* 3, 30: οὐκ οὐν ἐξ ἀμελείας ἡμῖν εἰς ἔμφυτον ἀτολμίαν ἢ μίμησις περιέστη; I agree with Swain in Penella 2009, p. 91 n. 16 that this sentence should be a question, and that we should read οὐκ οὐν instead of οὐκοῦν.

true in the case of the Lydians, and the one endorsed by Choricius elsewhere, is that nature and character are immutable and cannot be affected by imitation.

In his most famous work, the *Defence of the Mimes* (*Or.* 8 = *Op.* 32 in Foerster 1929), Choricius defends mime dancers against the charges of immorality and effeminacy, arguing that, on the one hand, the dancers' own character is not affected by their *mimesis* of women or effeminate men, and, on the other hand, that the spectators' moral standing is not compromised nor do they run the risk of imitating the behaviour they see on stage. For better or worse, he says, every man's "nature" is immutable (140: ἀμετάστατον ἐκατέροις ἢ φύσις). If a man was born modest, you cannot change him even if you rupture your throat singing the most shameful songs to him (134: σῶφρων ἔφυ τις ἕτερος· οὐ μετατίθης τὸν ἄνδρα, κἂν διαρραγῆς ἄδων αἴσχιστα μέλη). Choricius goes on to quote lines from Euripides and Pindar, which also present nature as impossible to overcome (135: πάντες δὲ ἄμαχον εἰρηκότες εἶναι τὴν φύσιν)³⁴.

The most pertinent passage, however, from the *Defence of the Mimes* refers specifically to the cross-dressing of mime dancers. Here Choricius makes the obvious (for us) point that an actor assumes a role, along with a costume, for the duration of his performance, but does not actually become that role³⁵:

οὐ γὰρ συναλλοιοῦται τοῖς ἐσθήμασιν ἡ ψυχὴ, κἂν συνάδοντά τις τῷ σχήματι φθέγγηται. οὔτε γὰρ ἀνδρεῖον ἢ λεοντὴ τὸν Ἀριστοφάνους ἐποίει Ξανθίαν οὔτε δειλὸν ἢ γυναικεῖα στολὴ τὸν Πηλέως, κἂν ἐγὼ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦτο τῆς ἀγωνιστικῆς ἀποθέμενος ἀναλάβω στρατιώτου σκευήν, οὐ γενήσομαί τις πολεμικός³⁶.

As Webb points out, Choricius shows here "his acute awareness that he himself is adopting a persona when he performs"³⁷. Being himself a kind of actor, Choricius is anxious to show that outward appearance does not necessarily reflect (and certainly

34. It is interesting that the Pindaric verses (*Olympian* 11, 19-20: τὸ γὰρ ἐμφυὲς οὔτ' αἴθων ἀλώπηξ / οὔτ' ἐρίβρομοι λέοντες διαλλάσσιντο ἦθος), which mean that neither the fox nor the lion will change its (own) nature, are taken by Choricius to mean (allegorically) that neither eloquent deceit (the fox) nor fear (the lion) can change a person's natural disposition. In quoting Pindar and Euripides, Choricius follows his model, Libanius' speech *On behalf of the Dancers*, where the same authors (but different verses) are quoted to illustrate the exact same point, that innate disposition dictates moral and immoral behaviour (64, 45-47). On Libanius' speech more will be said below.

35. This passage is brought into connection with the transvestism theme in Choricius' declamations in Webb 2006, p. 118. The English translation is taken from there.

36. Chor., *Or.* 8, 77: "For a soul does not change along with clothes, even if one utters words that fit the disguise. The lion's skin did not make Aristophanes' Xanthias into a brave man, nor did female dress make Peleus' son [Achilles] a coward, and if I take off the orator's dress and take up military equipment, I will not become a warlike man."

37. Chor., *Or.* 8, 77. Webb's central thesis is that Choricius' declamations as well as the *Defence of the Mimes* work together to create "acceptance of a fictional realm, partially removed from daily life, but with an intimate relation to the everyday" (Webb 2006, p. 119). On Choricius' conception of poetry, and subsequently of declamation, as literature and fiction, see also Hadjitofi forthcoming.

does not affect) the “inside”, the moral character of a person, and in this he differs from Roman orators and oratorical theorists, such as Seneca and Quintilian, for whom gender is entirely performative and socially constructed, the rhetor is in constant danger of resembling an (effeminate) actor, and “the precariousness of virility verges on the obsessive”³⁸. Choricus has no problem admitting that he is in fact playing a part, which involves putting on “the orator’s dress” (τὸ σχῆμα τοῦτο τῆς ἀγωνιστικῆς). To illustrate his point Choricus adduces two examples: one from literature (the cowardly Xanthias in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* does not become brave when he puts on the lion skin) and one from mythology: the *exemplum* of Achilles’ stay on the island of Skyros, dressed as girl, before he is discovered by Odysseus and goes on to fight in the Trojan War. It is striking that this last example was used in *Declamation 2* (mentioned above) by Priam to illustrate the exact opposite point, that is, that men can be trained in women’s work, just like women can be trained to become good soldiers³⁹.

Joy Connolly has convincingly argued that Greek orators of the Second Sophistic deliberately exaggerated the effeminate, theatrical qualities of both their oratory and their lifestyle, in an attempt to implicitly contest (or resist) the dominant, Roman ideology, which demonised those very qualities⁴⁰. Greek Late Antique orators (for different reasons from those of their predecessors) openly and explicitly maintain that the behaviour which was traditionally considered effeminate for both orators and actors (having to do with their dress, gestures, rhythmical speech) is, in fact, not an accurate marker of their masculine identity. Choricus’ *Defence of the Mimes* is itself modelled onto Libanius’ speech *On behalf of the Dancers*⁴¹, where the orator brings together the poet, the actor, and the rhetor as entertainers, “whose passion is to gather together words”⁴² (106), and whose mission is to educate the crowds (108 and 112) and alleviate their suffering when they are grieving (115). Just like Choricus in the passage cited above, Libanius also mentions the episode of Achilles on Skyros as a case of dress hiding, rather than revealing, inner character: when Odysseus and Diomedes show up on Skyros, “the son of Peleus is revealing what he really is instead of what he seems to be”⁴³.

38. See Richlin 1997, p. 91.

39. On the polysemy of this myth in Roman art, literature, and rhetoric, see Barchiesi 2005, p. 47-48. The most recent analysis of Greek and Latin texts that recount this myth is by Fantuzzi 2012, p. 21-97 – no Late Antique texts are considered however. On the continued popularity of the Skyros episode in Late Antique mosaics, see Ghedini 1997, p. 247-251.

40. See Connolly 2001, esp. p. 92: “Greeks play up Roman vices: they imitate, pose, wear perfume, play the woman.”

41. See Cresci 1986 on the correspondences between the two works and esp. p. 52 on the argument that it is impossible to change a person’s nature.

42. The translation is taken from Molloy 1996; cf. p. 87 on Libanius describing himself as a performer or actor in some of his other works.

43. Lib., *Or.* 64, 68: καὶ τὸν ὄντα ἀντὶ τοῦ δοκοῦντος ὁ Πηλέως ἐκφαίνει. The paradigm of Achilles is also used earlier, in paragraph 55, where the conclusion is that “thus, neither gait nor mask nor shape nor dress nor hair style nor any other of all these factors would in any way ever carry greater weight than moral commitment”.

To return to Choricus' declamations now, it is certainly relevant that the Lydians, towards the end of their speech, claim that "It was always our habit to practice keeping our words short and not waste an occasion for action on prolixity. But now that we have the leisure, we are delighted (ψυχαγωγούμεθα) by longer speeches"⁴⁴. The Lydians' former, manly βραχυλογία is replaced by feminine prolixity, presumably showcased in this very speech. What the Lydians say presents as effeminate not only themselves (as the apparent speakers), but also Choricus (the man actually composing the speech), and the audience (delighted or entertained by the speech, as the verb ψυχαγωγούμεθα indicates). Two paragraphs earlier (52) Choricus also has the Lydians mention in one breath playing the lyre (κιθαρίζειν) and teaching children (διδάσκειν τοὺς παῖδας) as the (effeminate) activities they are now experts on. As underlined above, however, all this should be taken ironically. The audience is supposed to know that the Lydians' masculine identity is uncompromised, hiding underneath their feminine garb and anxious to be revealed, just like Achilles on Skyros. Their new-found skills in oratory and in teaching children might nuance their personalities, but these are also just a role they can take up and then put down, just as Choricus can assume (or not) the orator's dress.

The transvestite general of *Declamation* 11 is also an actor of sorts, in spite of his own protestations, and is also not as feminised as he seems. Close to the end of his speech, and right after giving us the imaginary story of the general who commits adultery to save his city, the speaker comes up with two historical – literary *exempla* to further illustrate his argument that not all valiant deeds should be depicted (at least not realistically, in the way they really happened). The first one (88-93) is Zopyrus the Persian, who mutilated himself and went over to the Babylonians as a defector, in order to open the city's gates to the Persians⁴⁵. According to the War Hero, the Persians also had "a law that the one doing a great public service be immortalized in the house of the king", but did not think it fitting to depict there a mangled man. The same idea is conveyed in the *exemplum* of Cynegirus, the Athenian who lost both his hands at the battle of Marathon, while trying to hold onto a Persian ship⁴⁶. The speaker here points out that in the commemorative painting made by Phasis, Cynegirus had both his arms, and cites an epigram⁴⁷, which praises the painter for not removing the hands of a man who became immortal because of his hands. Cynegirus is "whole" in his pictorial representation, and this should be so because his inner self is whole, even though he has lost parts of his body. In the same way, it is implied, the general of this speech suffered a change in his outward appearance (a change he

44. Chor., *Decl.* 3, 54: Ἀεὶ μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν σύνηθες ἦν βραχυλογίαν ἀσκεῖν καὶ μὴ δαπανᾶν ἔργου καιρὸν εἰς μῆκος ῥημάτων· νῦν δὲ σχολὴν ἄγοντες μακροτέραις ὁμιλίαις ψυχαγωγούμεθα.

45. The story of Zopyrus comes from Hdt. III, 153-160.

46. Cynegirus' feat is first mentioned in Herodotus (VI, 114), where he only loses one hand, but quickly becomes a literary motif in accounts of the Persian Wars, and is retold with increasing flair and exaggeration during Imperial times; see Favreau-Linder 2003.

47. Perhaps by Gaius Cornelius Gallus: *Anthologia Planudea* IV, 117.

would not have chosen under normal circumstances), but this change did not cripple or feminise his “inside”.

The analogy between transvestism and mutilation is very interesting: it seems that both alter drastically the “outside” and how one is perceived by others, while the “inside”, the person’s moral character, remains intact. Zopyrus is represented as a kind of actor: he approaches the gates of Babylon “taking the part of a terrified man, creating a sight at odds with one who is involved in a scheme and thus deceiving those watching from the towers”⁴⁸. Zopyrus constructs a mask out of his own body, and assumes the role of a terrified man (πρόσωπον αὐτῷ δεδιότος κατασκευάζων). Zopyrus’ self-mutilation is described one paragraph earlier: he cut off his nose and ears, clipped his hair, and whipped his whole body; he then presented himself to Darius, who was unable to recognise him, “concealed in the mutilation of his body” (κρυπτόμενον τῇ τοῦ σώματος λύμῃ). In this sentence, the mutilation (τῇ λύμῃ) could be a dative of manner (Zopyrus conceals himself this way) or a locative dative (Zopyrus is concealed in his mutilation) – this last interpretation, although more imaginative, is more consistent with the idea of Zopyrus as an actor: his mutilation becomes his costume, and like actors’ costumes, it leaves the man within “whole”. Zopyrus hides inside his own body.

One question that emerges is whether this essentialist view of gender, which dismisses dress and physical appearance as significant markers of identity⁴⁹, would be perceived as subversive by Choricus’ contemporary audience. Schouler has suggested that, whereas Choricus proclaims human nature immutable, for Christian thinkers the human being is εὐμετάβολος, easily influenced by the state of the body⁵⁰. Indeed, for many Church Fathers the theatre, where cross-dressing is prevalent, is the “special province of the devil”⁵¹, who also does not wage war against Christians openly (οὐδὲ φανερώς), but prefers to mask himself (ἐπικαλύμμασι κεκρημένος) and use tricks to deceive them⁵². For John Chrysostom, as Leyerle puts it, “integrity is visible in a person’s outward deportment. For him, true virginity necessarily dictates more than simple sexual abstinence; it dictates a total demeanor. Virginity must be manifest in a person’s look, language, laughter, dress, gait and fanfare”⁵³. Chrysostom writes a

48. Chor., *Decl.* 11, 90: καὶ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ δεδιότος κατασκευάζων καὶ θέαν ἐμφαίνων ἐναντίαν τῷ συνειδότη καὶ ταύτη τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν πύργων ὁρῶντας ἐξαπατῶν.

49. Webb 2006 and 2008, p. 151 argues for a general dissociation between appearance and reality in Choricus’ works. What interests me here is Choricus’ presentation of the body (in terms of its shapes, dress, and movements) as not reflecting (or having an influence on) the inner person.

50. See Schouler 2001, p. 266-267.

51. Leyerle 2001, p. 44. Cf. Webb 2008, *passim*.

52. See Iohan. Chrys., *Epist. Ephes.* 22, 3 (PG LXII, 158): Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπλῶς, οὐδὲ φανερώς ἡμῖν ὁ ἐχθρὸς πολεμεῖ, ἀλλὰ μεθοδεῖα. Τί ἐστὶ μεθοδεῖα; Μεθοδεύσαι ἐστὶ τὸ ἀπατῆσαι, καὶ διὰ μηχανῆς ἐλεῖν [...] Οὐδέποτε φανερά προτίθησι τὰ ἁμαρτήματα, εἰδωλολατρεῖαν οὐ λέγει, ἀλλ’ ἐτέρως αὐτὸ κατασκευάζει μεθοδεύων, τουτέστι, πιθανὸν κατασκευάζων τὸν λόγον, ἐπικαλύμμασι κεκρημένος.

53. Leyerle 2001, p. 74.

diatribe against those Christian men who live with women in “spiritual marriages”, claiming to lead together an ascetic life. His argument is that those men’s prolonged, close contact with women nullifies any claims to manhood they might have. He sees them as soldiers who, having put on their armour and with the enemy ready to raze their city to the ground, instead of heading to their battle positions, enter the house and sit among the women⁵⁴ – a situation reminiscent of Choricus’ Lydians. These men allow women to order them about, and end up adopting female habits and speech – just like the Lydians claim that their masculine brevity of speech has been replaced with feminine prolixity as a consequence of their effeminate lifestyle.

It would be misleading, however, to claim that for *all* Christian thinkers the condition (or appearance) of the body reveals and/or influences the condition of the soul. In his *City of God*, Augustine, arguing that rape victims should not be considered unchaste, says that it is not the integrity of the body that makes a person “holy”, but the virtue of his/her soul, and that this virtue can remain constant in the soul, whatever action is imposed on the body by necessity⁵⁵. One of the metaphors Augustine uses to illustrate this point is torture: he cites the example of Regulus, who was killed by being made to stand in a chest affixed with nails on every side (I, 15). The inescapability of Regulus’ torture and death is meant as a parallel to what women suffer in rape. Neither Regulus, nor rape victims can be blamed for what happened to them, and the state of their bodies does not detract from their virtue. Choricus’ metaphor of mutilation is close in spirit to what Augustine says: Zopyrus may have inflicted mutilation on himself, but, like the War Hero’s transvestism, it was done in order to achieve a much higher purpose; his inner qualities were not reflected in, or affected by, what happened to his body. It is significant that, in his *Soliloquies*, Augustine suggests that, contrary to popular opinion, a man might even become manlier if, exactly like Choricus’ War Hero, he assumes feminine garb in order to save his country⁵⁶.

At the same time, many saints’ lives, written in Late Antiquity, present the saint as leading a double life, one in public and one (more devout or ascetic) in private. A prime example is Macrina, as described by her brother, Gregory of Nyssa. In public Macrina is an obedient daughter and grieving widow, while in private she is an ascetic virgin, devoted to chastity, and even has a secret name, Thecla⁵⁷. Simeon the Holy Fool, who lived in the same century as Choricus, played the fool in public (throwing nuts at women in church, urinating in public, dancing naked in the streets with prostitutes), but performed miracles and extraordinary ascetic feats in secrecy. Only after his death did the people who had known him realise that his foolishness was feigned and

54. See Iohan. Chrys., *Contra eos qui subintroductas habent virgines* 11, with the comments by Leyerly 2001, p. 112-117.

55. Aug., *Civ. Dei* I, 15-18.

56. Aug., *Soliloq.* 2, 16, 30. I owe this reference to Mickael Ribreau, whose paper in the conference included a discussion of this passage.

57. On Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*, see Vasileiou 2012, with further comments on the double identities of the siblings of Gregory of Nazianzus on p. 462.

that he was indeed a saint ⁵⁸. This sense of privacy that emerges in Late Antiquity, the ability of an individual to lead an entirely secret life, which contrasts with his/her public image, is relevant for the dissociation between the (effeminate) appearance and the (masculine) reality of Choricus' transvestites. In "classical" terms, it would be hard to explain how the Lydians' prolonged cross-dressing and contact with women's activities did not affect their masculinity. If we take into account, however, that the Late Antique individual could have a private, secret life, which could not be read from the condition of his or her body (and Simeon's public nakedness is a good example), the Lydians' case is not so difficult to explain.

There is also a strand in Christian thought, expressed more often in popular stories than in the writings of the Church Fathers, which sees cross-dressing not as a threat to masculine (or feminine) identity, but as a valid way to transcend the limitations of either gender. In a sub-genre of female hagiography, circulating mostly in the Greek East, the saint runs away from an unwanted or dysfunctional marriage, cuts off her hair, takes a male name, assumes male garments, and lives as a hermit or monk until the end of her life, when she is finally revealed to be woman ⁵⁹. These legends suggest that, for their audience, gender could be both a construct (the female saints pass as men for a big part of their lives) and an immutable trait, as, at the end, the saint's true gender is always revealed and she is celebrated in her real, female name.

More relevant for this paper are those (few) legends of male saints who donned feminine garb ⁶⁰. I will only consider here one example: the martyrdom of saints Sergius and Bacchus, soldiers of the Roman army, who were martyred in Syria during the reign of the Western emperor Maximian (286-305). The two men refuse to sacrifice to Zeus before a battle, and Maximian himself orders them to be tortured and humiliated. The two soldiers' military garb is removed, and women's garments are placed on them. Paraded throughout the city, the two saints reach the middle of the marketplace, where they chant, "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and putting off the form of the old man, naked in faith we rejoice in you, Lord, because you have clothed us with the garment of salvation, and have covered us with the robe of righteousness; as brides you have decked us with women's gowns and joined us

58. On the biography of Simeon the Fool, written by Leontius of Neapolis, see Krueger 1996.

59. For recent overviews and analyses of these legends, see Davis 2002, and Constantinou 2005, p. 90-126. The most recent discussion is by Upson-Saia 2011, p. 84-103, who underlines that the saint "remains throughout a woman in the reader's mind" (p. 86), and that their cross-dressing "spoke only to a notion of symbolically transcended gender, to her spiritual manliness rather than any real change in gender status" (p. 103).

60. One further legend of male transvestism can be found in Kuefler 2001, p. 240-243. Kuefler studies these stories as manifestations of a "subordinated masculinity" that emerged in Late Antique Christian culture. His focus, however, is the Western Roman Empire, and so he analyses these legends in their Latin versions; here I will concentrate on the Greek (probably earlier) version of the *Passion*.

together for you [or: joined us to you] through our confession”⁶¹. Even though their cross-dressing is coerced, the two saints easily accept their new gender identity; the soldiers of Christ re-interpret themselves as brides of Christ. As Kuefler notes, their chant is a pastiche of Biblical passages⁶², culminating in a near-quotation from the Book of Isaiah, where the Lord adorns the soul with ornaments, like a bride⁶³. The two saints’ acceptance of feminine garments shows how Christianity, while officially upholding a strict division of genders, could also muddle gender categories in certain contexts. One of these is the case of martyrdom, whose underlying premise is that the (male) body should perform acts of “passive resistance”, which involves putting on the traditionally feminine attire of submissiveness and endurance.

The example of Sergius and Bacchus shows how Christian culture could, at the same time, denounce the cross-dressing of actors and celebrate the cross-dressing of saints. Sergius and Bacchus remain men: their reality is something separate from their feminine outward appearance. When the two martyrs are depicted in Christian iconography, they are normally depicted as soldiers, and never as transvestites. This was precisely the War Hero’s point: transvestism might have nuanced his personality in some ways, but he should not be remembered as a transvestite. Even though most Church Fathers favoured “social construction”, and promulgated the “constructivist” view that a person’s outward deportment should accurately represent their inner character, there are “essentialist” trends not only in their own thinking, but also (and more strikingly) in popular stories about saints and martyrs, some of which even involve transvestism. These cultural icons resisted the equivalence between appearance and reality, and showed that physical manifestations of gender could be both deceiving and irrelevant to a person’s natural gender identity, and in this, I have argued, they are similar to the manly transvestites in the declamations of Choricus.

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61. The English translation (by John Boswell) can be found online, here: <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs/user/scotts/ftp/wpaf2mc/serge.html> (accessed on June 1, 2016) *The Passion of SS. Sergius and Bacchus* (Μαρτύριον τῶν ἁγίων Σεργίου καὶ Βάκχου) 7: ‘ἀπεκδυσάμενοι παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ σχῆμα, γυμνοὶ τῇ πίστει ἀγαλλιασώμεθα ἐπὶ σοὶ, Κύριε, ὅτι ἐνέδυσας ἡμᾶς ἱμάτιον σωτηρίας, καὶ χιτῶνα εὐφροσύνης περιέβαλες ἡμᾶς, ὡς νύμφας κατεκόσμησας ἡμᾶς γυναικείαις στολαῖς, ἀρμοσάμενος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ τῆς εἰς σέ ὁμολογίας’.

62. See Kuefler 2001, p. 241.

63. *Isaias* 61, 10: καὶ ὡς νύμφην κατεκόσμησέν με κόσμῳ.

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